[Phone ringing]

Interviewee: Hello?

Interviewer: Hi, is this Denise Rolark Barnes?

Interviewee: Speaking.

Interviewer: Hi, Rick Massimo from WTOP.

Interviewee: Hi Rick, how are you this morning?

Interviewer: I'm doing okay. How are you?

Interviewee: Good, good, thank you.

Interviewer: Okay. So do you have a couple of minutes?

Interviewee: I do.

Interviewer: Okay great, thanks. So yeah I mean if you can tell me you know like I said I'm writing about Marion Barry's first election and sort of what it meant and you know the details of the campaign itself and sort of what it meant for the city. I'm asking as many people as I can what, you know what they remember about the campaign and the importance.

Interviewee: Wow, okay, because I was trying to figure out, "What? I know it's about Marion Barry" but I couldn't remember what we were going to talk about.

Barry was elected in what '70?

Interviewer: '78 was the first time.

Interviewee: '78, okay. I'm trying to remember it. Let's see I graduated from high school in '72, graduated from college in '76, okay and law school in '79.

You know the only – I don't have a very, so I may not be a good person after all of this, I don't have a very vivid or clear recollection of the election, of that election. You know I know that my – '78, yeah I really don't. Is it the same – I think it was the same election where my stepmother was first elected so I was like 21, 22. So yeah you know I'm going to have to think about this for a

minute because I don't have a real clear recollection of that election.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I know there was something afterwards but I don't remember – you know because I think that was right after Walter Washington.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Yeah I'd have to kind of think about that for a minute, because I just don't have a clear recollection of that election.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I know I voted.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I do know I voted.

Interviewer: Okay. Well I mean I know, I mean I saw you quoted elsewhere about sort of the importance that Marion Barry had to the community and sort of how that you know how that guaranteed him a certain amount of support even through all his troubles, yeah?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm. Yeah but you know I don't think there were really many, there weren't any troubles at that time. You know the district was just coming out of, still kind of I won't say, "coming out," but still sort of you know simmering from you know ten years past the assassination of Dr. King and you know the city was still torn apart and we were… You know we had I think the school board was you know very active at the time and trying to you know… I think those were probably the most heated elections what was going on with the school board as he served – you know went from the school board to the city council, I mean to the mayor's – well he went from the school board to the council and then became mayor.

Interviewer: To the council, yeah.

Interviewee: Right. So you know I think maybe his election at that time was probably right for that moment. Because as DC was transitioning you know and sort of getting a footing of what it meant to be a predominately African American controlled city you know a person who was very clear about you know who he was and his

blackness so to say you know was what folks in the district were looking for.

You know like I said I'd have to – I'm struggling here because I don't even remember who ran against at the time.

Interviewer: Oh that was Walter Washington and Sterling Tucker.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah. I think I mean I think people really had a lot of respect for the both of them, but I think you know this was a time when you know race really played an issue and someone who was I would say almost unapologetically black you know in the way Barry dressed, spoke, his presence in the community, all spoke to the desires or wishes of a leader from a DC resident, many who came from other places and came to DC because they liked the idea of this – which I don't think it had been called, started being called "Chocolate City," at the time, but essentially was, so it meant a place of opportunity and Barry represented that.

So I mean later he ended up having his legal problems and whatever else, but I don't think there was that much going on at the time as far as his you know the promise that he brought for a city like Washington, DCC to have the kind of leadership that it appeared that he was going to bring.

Interviewer: Sure. No he didn't have, he didn't have legal problems at the time, but it seems to me you know people are, you know so many people were so mystified like, "How can people still be supporting him?" And the more I learn about, the more I learn about how, about who he was before he became mayor and during his first campaign and such it seems to me like I feel like, "Oh I get it," but that's what, you know that's what carried him through the hard times it seems.

Interviewee: Right, right, exactly, exactly.

Interviewer: Yeah. It seems to me like Walter Washington was the right mayor for his time. He seemed like a Jackie Robinson type and he sort of, it seems like he sort of paved the way for somebody like you say more unapologetically black than like Marion Barry. Does that seem right?

Interviewee: Yeah I think so. Plus you know Walter Washington was already there. You know so he was a good transition I think for the city. He was appointed and then after that elected. It was a safe transition while the city… And you know like I said the city was changing,

because you know Walter Washington was there during that period of – I mean there was a lot… Marion was pride you know.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: He helped I think Walter Washington sort of manage the city prior to the…and others, because there were a lot of others who were involved with Marion and doing a lot of work in communities and trying to deal with the issues of police brutality, discrimination, you know all the issues that African Americans are facing in the city, plus you know there was this flight away from the city that you know started with whites and then later on you know African American started moving out of Prince George County, so there was a population loss and all of that.

So you know I think Walter Washington was helped in that transition. Then after the assassination of Dr. King and the city did what it did you know you needed I think a more forceful healing voice. So Washington like you said I think was good for his time. Marion I think was I don't want to make a comparison, I was about too, but I'm not going to go there. But you know I think he was and I don't want to call him "extreme," but "vocal" that's the word, more vocal in expressing the desires of or the needs of African American at a time when the city was really struggling.

Interviewer: Yeah. Now one thing I noticed I don't know, I don't know if you can help with this, you know I know that in 1940 DC was 71 percent white and 28 percent black and in 1970 it was exactly the opposite. I assumed that was from white people running off to the suburbs and you know to a large extent yeah that was true. But when I looked at the actual numbers the number of black people in DC doubled over that time. So it wasn't just white people moving out, it was black moving in. Do you know that was about?

Interviewee: Yeah. Well my mother, father, stepmother, father-in-law, aunt, uncles, the federal government was hiring. I mean I think someone probably in their 80 could probably tell that story better than I could. But my mother is from Detroit, my father is from Texas, my stepmother is from Virginia, my father-in-law was from North Carolina. So folks that were leaving particularly the south and coming to the federal government. I think the federal government had a lot to do with that, because and I don't really know… Anyway they, a lot of them came here and got sort of low-level government jobs.

And the city or the federal government, I'm not sure, provided housing opportunities for folks. I know Parkland over here in southeast if I'm not mistaken and I'm on Mississippi Avenue. Another friend of mine who was from Georgia I believe, you know when he came to Washington, he's a few years older than me, there are apartments around here that was all government housing. So if you came to work for the federal government, I don't know where the white folks went, but the black folks there were housing, apartment buildings that were provided for folks who came to live and work for the feds.

So you know I would have to ask my mother really how when she graduated from high school and came here and started working for the state department. You know my stepmother actually came to go to college. My father-in-law came to work for the government printing office. My aunt came to work for the department of Agriculture. So that's what brought them to Washington between I'd say maybe the late '40s or the '40s you know to early '60s.

Interviewer: Okay. Is there anything else you wanted to add? I just want to make sure I'm covering everything.

Interviewee: No I'm not – so no because it's just knowing what you need and if there's anybody I could refer you to I'd be willing to do that. They could probably give you more substantive information than I have.

Interviewer: Well that was going to be my next question you know I'm, I'd love to know if there's anybody who you can think offhand I should be talking to?

Interviewee: And this is primarily about Barry's first election?

Interviewer: Yeah, 1978, because next month is the 40th anniversary.

Interviewee: Right. Have you talked to Absalom Jordan?

Interviewer: No I haven't.

Interviewee: Okay. Do you know him?

Interviewer: No, I'm sorry I don't. I'm still relatively new in town.

Interviewee: Okay, yeah. I haven't seen him for awhile. He lives out here, but he was really involved with I think Barry's campaign and a lot of the things, is it the Black United Front and all that Barry was involved

in, a lot of folks were involved in during that period. He might be a good person to talk to.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you got a phone number for him?

Interviewee: Let me see, hold on.

Interviewer: Thanks.

Interviewee: Yeah you can try [redacted phone number].

Interviewer: Okay great.

Interviewee: And what I'll do I'm going to call him now and just let him know that to expect your call.

Interviewer: All right thanks very much.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: Thanks.

Interviewee: And if I think of anybody else I'll call back.

Interviewer: Okay thanks much.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: Bye.

Interviewee: Bye-bye.

[End of Audio]